VCE Music Composition (Units 3 and 4: 2023–2027)

School-based assessment report

This report is provided for the first year of implementation of this study and is based on the School-based Assessment Audit and VCAA statistical data.

All official communications regarding the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) [Music Composition Study Design](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/vce/vce-study-designs/MusicComposition/Pages/index.aspx) are provided in the *[VCAA Bulletin](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/news-and-events/bulletins-and-updates/bulletin/Pages/index.aspx)*. It is recommended that teachers subscribe to the [*VCAA Bulletin*](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/news-and-events/bulletins-and-updates/bulletin/Pages/index.aspx) to receive updated information regarding the study. Schools are required to alert teachers to information in *VCAA Bulletins*, especially concerning assessment schedules. Important administrative dates and assessment schedules are published on the school administration page of the *[VCAA website](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Pages/HomePage.aspx)*.

General

General Comments

This is the first School-based Assessment Audit undertaken in Music Composition as part of the reaccredited VCE Music Study Design 2023–2027.

The main change for the revised VCE Music Composition study is that the end-of-year written examination is now only one hour in length and assesses only Outcome 3. This reduction in workload gives students more time to focus on the composition(s) they create for the Externally assessed task (EAT), which now contributes 50 per cent to the study score. The study retains an overall mix of creating, analysing and responding to music.

Unit 3

General Comments

The School-based Coursework tasks for Unit 3 relate to Outcomes 1, 2 and 3 and are very similar in nature and intent to equivalent tasks in the previous study design.

All schools audited were using the VCE Music Study Design 2023–2027.

In general, the tasks developed by each school in the audit used very similar formats and instructions for the assessment tasks. In Outcome 3, the task designs mirrored the formats of the published Sample Examination materials. This was appropriate, although teachers and schools are encouraged to consider the most appropriate form of task for their cohort of students. This might not always mirror the examination-type questions.

Teachers should be aware that the tasks they design must allow for the demonstration of the ‘highest level of performance’ and be ‘flexible enough to cater for the full range of student performance’. This advice is provided in the 2023 Assessment advice for the VCE, which is published on the [VCAA website](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Pages/HomePage.aspx).

In some cases, the wording of questions remained somewhat general and used a limited range of question stems. For example, all questions in an Outcome 1 task required students to develop creative responses to works studied and document the creative process.

Specific information

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A variety of question types and formats is encouraged across the tasks for both Outcome 2 and Outcome 3. For example: identify, describe, discuss, analyse, etc.

It is advisable to use terminology from the study design when framing tasks or writing questions. In general, the use of established terminology was very good. Occasionally there was use of terms that were certainly musical but might cause some confusion if this was the sole term used to describe an element of music. It should be noted that the descriptions of elements of music and compositional devices found in the Cross-study specifications (pages 15–19 of the study design) provide both the definitions used in the current studies, and also many examples of further concepts that can be explored, depending on the works and styles selected for study or as listening examples. ‘Transition’ was a new compositional device added to the 2023–2027 study design.

There was evidence of some confusion concerning the awarding of a satisfactory result for an outcome. A student will satisfactorily complete an outcome if the teacher has seen evidence of the understandings and skills outlined in the study design. Satisfactory completion is not required to be tied exclusively to performance in the School-assessed Coursework task.

Outcome 1: Creating

On completion of this unit, the student should be able to develop creative responses to works studied and document the creative process.

Tasks

All schools understood the nature of the task and the need for a clear connection between the stimulus work and the final response. All schools were also clear in outlining the nature of the musical task: two creative responses (short compositions/sketches) and associated documentation.

Some schools provided a step-by-step guide to completing this task. This can provide an effective approach for students.

Things to consider when outlining the task requirements for students include:

* creating music
* understanding elements of music based on characteristics of music studied
* using compositional devices such as repetition, variation and/or contrast to develop music ideas
* technical and/or practical factors that influence the creative works
* documentation, including characteristics of the works and how they influence the creative works
* using digital audio format with appropriate notation and documentation.

Assessment

The marking schedule for Outcome 1 needs to be based on the key skills outlined in the current study design. This outcome is awarded up to 20 marks out of the 80 marks for the unit of study.

In all schools audited, the assessment task for Outcome 1 was held towards the end of the unit. Outcome 2 was generally due later than Outcome 1. This is appropriate, giving students the chance to build on skills throughout the unit before assessment.

In general, assessment criteria and marking schemes were based on published VCAA performance descriptors. These should be available to students well before the assessment.

Performance descriptors are published as a guide for teachers. Actual weightings and marking schemes for any task may then be created by teachers and communicated to students before the task. Students should have a clear understanding of how their response will fit into the overall marking scheme and the areas on which they need to focus.

Outcome 2: Analysing for composition

On completion of this unit, the student should be able to analyse the use of the elements of music concepts and compositional devices in music works, explain how musical material is developed within the works, and formulate a folio design brief.

Tasks

Things to consider in designing this task may include:

* the treatment of music elements and use of compositional devices used in works for study
* ways in which works are representative of a particular style
* how music material is developed to create a work
* reflection of how the works studied affect their own creative progress
* how this can be incorporated into a folio brief.

Assessment

Assessment criteria and marking schemes were largely based on published VCAA performance descriptors. Again, these were available to students well before assessment.

There was some confusion about the weighting of components, with an implication that all criteria were weighted equally.

Outcome 3: Responding

On completion of this unit, the student should be able to aurally analyse music from a range of styles and make critical responses to music.

Tasks

Assessment tasks in this area are based around students forming written responses to short excerpts of music that they have not heard before. Music extracts chosen for the task should be from a broad range of styles, geographical locations and eras.

All schools audited prepared tasks that were in line with the intentions of the outcome. In general, the format for this task involved one test-based session of around 60 minutes. Students were asked to respond to 4 separate extracts.

The range of music styles represented in the extracts was diverse. Excerpts came from many styles including traditional Western European music, modern contemporary styles, non-Western traditions, jazz and music theatre.

In all cases, the general formatting and length of the task mirrored Section A of the examination from the previous study design.

In some cases, extra care might have been taken in the length of music excerpts. Tracks that run for 3 minutes or more may work against giving students the chance to consolidate responses if, for example, there are 3 playings within an expected 12–15 minute section of the task. Editing the extracts down to perhaps 1’00” – 1’30” may also allow for more targeted questioning and clearer assessment guides.

While, in general, questions associated with the excerpts all revealed a clear knowledge of the understanding and skills that need to be assessed, two things might be considered:

1. A variety of question types (e.g. identify, list, describe, discuss, explain), along with a number of question formats (e.g. short answer, paragraph, extended response) should be encouraged. This will allow for a variety of responses, as well as supporting clearer differentiation of student achievement.
2. Questions that are targeted to specific musical characteristics in an excerpt can allow students a pathway into their response. For example, rather than a generalised question such as Discuss the use of repetition and contrast in this excerpt., a more targeted question might be:

*There are two clear sections in this extract. The first section features a great amount of repetition. The second section contrasts greatly to the first.*

1. *Identify and describe three ideas that repeat in the first section.*
2. *Discuss how contrast is achieved between the two sections.*

By targeting specifics within a work, teachers can provide students with a clear pathway for responses, as well as creating a more structured assessment/marking scheme.

Assessment

Assessment criteria and marking schemes were largely based on published VCAA performance descriptors.

Unit 4

General Comments

There was one major change in the structure of Unit 4 in the VCE Music Study Design 2023–2027. While the nature of the 3 outcomes remained very similar, students now analyse their own composition in Outcome 2, rather than another composer’s work.

All schools were aware of this change and provided evidence of designing programs associated with analysing the student’s own work in this outcome.

Outcomes 1 and 2 are assessed in the Externally assessed task (EAT), and teachers complete a marking sheet to submit along with each student’s submission. More details regarding the EAT, including guidelines for submission, can be found in the Assessment section of the Music Composition pages on the VCAA website.

Specific information

Unit 4

Outcome 1: Creating

On completion of this unit, the student should be able to create and evaluate an original work or a group of short works.

Tasks

For Unit 4, students must submit a main work of up to 5 minutes in both audio and notated form.

This submission makes up the EAT, which is assessed by a panel from the VCAA. The folio design brief from Unit 3 Outcome 2 is submitted along with the composition folder, but is not marked externally.

Schools successfully communicated EAT requirements to students. This was generally done by reproducing the 2023 VCAA EAT guidelines.

A number of schools included an ongoing requirement of a ‘composer’s diary’ during the creative process. This is a worthwhile activity and can provide useful evidence that can frame final documentation and provide authentication evidence.

In general, the Unit 4 EAT can benefit from scaffolding the process. For example, teachers might include a specific timeline during which documents such as an original statement of intention, or structural plans, are submitted. This can facilitate advice and feedback and provide opportunities to check that all aspects of the assessment criteria will be covered successfully. Such scaffolding will also provide evidence for ongoing authentication.

Things to be considered in designing this task may include:

* the creative process to create an original music work or a group of small works, including repetition, variation, contrast and transition
* manipulating the elements of music
* developing music material to create unity and diversity
* using appropriate audio and notation formats

Assessment

The Expected qualities published with the EAT documentation provide teachers with the marking scheme. The task is marked externally and the teacher’s mark used for quality assurance purposes.

Outcome 2: Analysing for composition

On completion of this unit, the student should be able to analyse and explain the use of the elements of music and compositional devices in music work and discuss the style and the context from which the work emerged. They should be able to describe and discuss their creative process and approach to creating a coherent work and produce an analysis of their original music work(s) that explains their use of music elements, concepts of music and compositional devices.

Tasks

The VCE Music Study Design 2023–2027 specifies the key knowledge and key skills that should be studied in this Outcome.

Assessment

The task is marked externally by the EAT panel, but teachers provide their marking sheet using the Expected qualities for quality assurance purposes.

Outcome 3: Responding

On completion of this unit the student should be able to aurally analyse music and make critical responses to music.

Tasks

As with Unit 3, students are required to provide aural analysis of, and written critical responses to, 4 excerpts of music in the format of responses to structured questions.

It needs to be emphasised that written responses should be based on a purely aural analysis of music excerpts, and those excerpts should be previously unheard.

Music scores should not be used within this assessment task.

As with Unit 3, music extracts perhaps between 1’00” and 2’00” are generally more conducive to targeted questioning, and clearer assessment guides.

A diversity of music styles, instrumentation and time periods is encouraged, as well as a range of question types. In general, this is occurring.

Using the general formatting and length of mirrored Section A of the sample examination is a good starting point for designing this assessment task.

Assessment

The marking schedule for Outcome 3 needs to be based on the key skills outlined in the current study design. This outcome is marked out of 20 marks for the unit of study.